

3.6 Deputy J. Renouf of St. Brelade of the Minister for External Relations regarding the organisational restructure at Ports of Jersey and its link to special attention status at Jersey Airport (OQ.130/2025):

Further to Written Question 228/2025, will the Minister provide details of the “organisational restructure” of Ports of Jersey that led to Jersey Airport being placed under “special attention” by the Office of the Director of Civil Aviation, and advise what measures are being taken to address the situation?

Deputy I.J. Gorst of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter (The Minister for External Relations):

The Office of the Director of Civil Aviation operates an escalation procedure that mirrors that used by the U.K. Civil Aviation Authority. Special attention status is level one, the lowest level of an escalation procedure, and is therefore a matter for the D.C.A. (Director of Civil Aviation) and the Airport. As I have stated in Written Question 228, I have been provided a high-level brief, as is appropriate at level one. This did not provide detail on the organisational restructure, however it highlighted that the restructure had resulted in the need for further recruitment as well as training and development among the management team. The D.C.A. and Ports of Jersey are now working to address the issues raised by the D.C.A.

3.6.1 Deputy J. Renouf:

The Minister is adopting a kind of nothing-to-see-here approach, but I have been told that the Airport has failed 2 security checks, that the control tower is not staffed with appropriately qualified personnel, and that a new recruit meant to address the shortage of qualified staff in the control tower, has since left. Can the Minister confirm this is the case, and what actions has he taken to ensure that Ports are on top of what is going on?

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

The action that is being taken is the action that I have described both in the answer to the written question and the oral question. That the Office of the Director of Civil Aviation, post the restructure, has put the Airport under level one escalation procedure, which is around special attention. I have just been clear in my answer to Members that that has required and will require special additional training. I understand from the Ports that they have also recruited consultants and there will be a further audit undertaken by the D.C.A. later this month, and they will revert back to me. Level one does not require and is not, as some have suggested ... that the Airport is not under level one subject to sanction or suspension of operations.

3.6.2 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:

Would the Minister advise how many meetings he had with the Ports to stay on top of the situation and what questions he asked the senior officials?

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

Normally, the level one escalation would not require a briefing to the Minister. It arises out of Ports’ restructure. When I was made aware of it in February, I asked for a meeting not only with the D.C.A., which I had, I also asked for a joint meeting with Ports of Jersey. Both agreed to work on the reasons that the D.C.A. had issued the level one escalation process, and they continue to do so. As I say, in that meeting, both Ports and the D.C.A. agreed that they would work to ensure that there was the correct training in place, and Ports confirmed that they had

used consultants to fill in any gaps that the D.C.A. had highlighted. There will, as I say, be a further review later this month and they will report back to me and to the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development. Because we remind ourselves that the D.C.A. sits under my Department, the operation of the Port sits under the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development.

3.6.3 Deputy I. Gardiner:

How long does the Minister expect the Airport to stay on in special attention category?

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

That I am not, of course, able to answer because that will be determined by the result of the review later this month that the D.C.A. will undertake.

3.6.4 Deputy A.F. Curtis of St. Clement:

Deputy Renouf gave a fairly specific list of questions he wished confirmation from the Minister for. Does the Minister recognise the instances given by Deputy Renouf and could he be firmer and clearer in his response on that? It was not that clear to me the first time.

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

I think, as I said, I do not have those details and not been provided with those details. I would expect that the D.C.A. would revert to me if he had concerns around the ongoing mitigations and improvements that he had agreed with Ports to be put in place. He has not yet done that, but he will be undertaking, as I said, a further review later this month and will reference back to me and the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development once that review has been undertaken.

3.6.5 Deputy A.F. Curtis:

Will the Minister, having had this conversation in the States now, seek clarification on those specific points so that if that is the case he will know the answer next time? Understanding he has not been briefed quite yet, will he undertake to seek those specifics?

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

I imagine now that I have had these questions in the States, that will be of the questions that I ask the D.C.A. when he reverts to me with the result of his review or audit, as Members would expect.

3.6.6 Deputy H.M. Miles of St. Brelade:

Given that the Airport was placed into special attention as a result of their own organisational structure one could say that this situation is self-inflicted. Therefore does the Minister have complete confidence in the chief executive of Ports of Jersey?

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

I am not sure that it is my place to say whether I have complete confidence in the chief executive of the Ports of Jersey or not. Within my remit falls the Office of the Director of Civil Aviation. As I have just said to Members, I have had these conversations with the Director of Civil Aviation. Inevitably, during reorganisation, as I understand it - and again I am not an expert on civil aviation - on any major reorganisation, then I understand that an escalation of special attention would be put in place. What is important and what was important for me when I was informed of that, and in my meeting with the Minister of Sustainable Economic Development, was that there was no risk to security and that Ports of Jersey were taking the action that the Director of Civil Aviation, which operates in line with international standards, asks them to

take. That he was confident that any perceived processes which were not working effectively were being addressed.

[10:00]

They both gave me that confidence but, as we all know, the proof will be in the eating of the pudding and we will only know that once the Director of Civil Aviation has done his further review later this month.

3.6.7 Deputy H.M. Miles:

I thank the Minister for his answer. Will the Minister publish any correspondence between Ports of Jersey and the D.C.A. relating to these issues between himself and Ports. I am not sure that that would be a normal process, nor am I sure that that would happen elsewhere, but it is certainly something I could consider.

3.6.8 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter:

On a similar train of thought, the Minister has referred to a review, a report, an audit that is going to happen in due course. Will that report also be published, and if not, why not?

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

As I have just said to Deputy Miles, I am not aware that that is the normal procedure but what I will certainly undertake to do is to ensure that Members are informed. Whether it is the actual report or a form of a report or a briefing to the public is already provided because it seems to me that the number of questions and the interest in this Assembly means that we need to ensure that Islanders continue to have confidence in the security operations of the Airport. One of the ways that we can do that is by putting information into the public domain.

3.6.9 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf of St. Saviour:

The Minister answered a series of questions what, in hindsight, may look like a script from a “Carry On” movie, and I make no joke about this or a “Yes, Prime Minister” with the Department of Regulation and Administrative Affairs who review external consultants. With the chief executive of the States of Jersey and the president of the new Chamber of Commerce speaking about the importance of A.L.O.s (arm’s length organisations) and cutting red tape, does he not think that it would be good for him to spend some time looking at the structures that we have created? Because it sounds as though this script could be a script for the Department of Administrative Affairs when we should be having tight, small, efficient, efficacious ways of dealing with things, not the department that passes things to other people and creating lots of things where people’s safety is concerned. Is it not time for a proper review, like the chief executive says?

The Bailiff:

It is within the ambit, in my view.

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

Funnily enough, I have just started rewatching the series “Yes, Minister”, and last night I got to where the Minister was made the Prime Minister. **[Laughter]** I am always struck by, sadly, in certain situations, how lifelike it actually is. I am sure members of the public would be surprised to hear me saying that. The Department for External Relations has responsibility for the Office of the Director of Civil Aviation which mirrors the U.K. Civil Aviation Authority. That has to be separate from the operation of the Airport and the Harbours themselves. Does it fit well with the Minister for External Relations? I do not believe it does. I think it is almost an accident of history that it sits here. Should we, in Jersey, be looking at methodologies which,

in this instance, puts supreme safety of Islanders and air transport; yes, we should. But should we find a way of going back to what we always used to do incredibly well in Jersey, which is sitting around the table sorting problems out without a big bureaucratic infrastructure, then he is absolutely right; we should. While I have to stand up and support the work of the D.C.A., and they have to make sure that Islanders' safety is paramount and security is paramount, we also have to have an economic and sustainable airport and harbours system. That does mean that we need to work together and we have got to get away from, as he highlighted, big bureaucracy that hinders us from doing our everyday work and that do not have Islanders at the heart of their operations.

3.6.10 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:

I am grateful, Sir, for you allowing that question, because in the Minister's answer, he is really pushing, I think, and I hope that I have said something uncomfortably true. Would he, in conclusion, rather than having more, very sadly "Yes, Prime Minister" episodes playing out in this Assembly this morning, which is dealing with the most important issue - as he says, safety - would he actually spend some of his weeks between now and the next election using his skills of Government to ... and I am not suggesting a chainsaw but dealing with the structures that we have put in place that we need to untangle in order to get better value for taxpayers and a safer Island? Yes or no would be fine. I would happily meet him next week.

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

That is partly what I am doing in the other area of my portfolio around financial services. He is absolutely right, it needs to be done. It is also something that I think the Chief Minister is absolutely committed to. I am just thinking out loud about my diary, but of course I will be happy to meet him next week to discuss it further.

3.6.11 Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:

The question for me really is why it has taken so long for the Government to acknowledge that there has been an issue at Jersey Airport being placed under special measures. I can see that there was a freedom of information request submitted back in February, asking whether the Airport had been put into special measures. The response was that it was exempt and that the Government did not give an answer. I also know that others had raised this with the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development as far back as February. Was the Minister for External Relations going to make a statement and tell at least States Members of the condition of the Airport, were it not for this oral question and written question from a States Member?

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

I was made aware of the special attention - we have to get the terminology correct - in February, probably around the time, I guess, but I do not have the dates in front of me ... just from Deputy Tadier's mention of the freedom of information request at about that time. As I am aware, that was the same time that the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development was made aware. At that point we, of course, undertook to brief the Deputy and his panel on what we knew. We offered for the Director of Civil Aviation to meet with the panel to brief them about concerns, which I understand had been raised with them, and I also understand that the Ports of Jersey, the offer was made that they would brief the panel as well, which I think has yet to take place but is in the diary. These issues are always difficult and, as I said in an earlier question, if I had thought that the D.C.A. felt that they were not getting traction with the Ports of Jersey and the Ports of Jersey were not taking the necessary action, then of course I would have had to make a more public statement. But my understanding at that time from meetings with both of them in the same room, that the actions that the Director of Civil Aviation were taking ... sorry,

that Ports of Jersey were taking were those which the Director of Civil Aviation thought they should take to deal with the issues that caused the Airport to be placed under special attention.

3.6.12 Deputy M. Tadier:

Would the Minister undertake to give a full timeline to Members and to publish it about who knew what when, and when this started to become a problem? Because certainly, as a panel, we were made aware of an issue at the beginning of February, when we raised it with the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development. That means that he knew at least about it then. I would be very surprised if this was not an ongoing issue before that. For public transparency, would he speak to his Ministerial colleagues and publish that timeline and circulate it, at least with States Members, if not with the public, so we know exactly what this problem is, how long it has been going on for and if we would have found out about it, and what can be put in the public domain?

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

As I understand it, the D.C.A. ... I am just trying to deal with those timelines now. On 10th December, the D.C.A. notified the accountable manager that the Ports of Jersey had been placed on special attention, that is stage one of escalation, and requested various things, and those things were forthcoming. I have that from a briefing that was provided to myself on 7th February. I became aware of it in early February. They, as far as I am aware, are the timelines. I cannot speak for others. If I am incorrect with those timelines, which I will go back to the department and check ... if I am incorrect then of course I will notify Members accordingly.

Deputy A. Howell of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:

Please may I raise the défaut on Deputy Jeune?

The Bailiff:

Yes, the défaut is raised on Deputy Jeune. I assume that meant you did not want to ask a question.

3.6.13 Deputy J. Renouf:

It looks like this organisational restructure from Ports of Jersey is not going to be winning any awards, and it was put in place and known about back in February. The Government believes in openness and transparency. There have been 3 opportunities to be open and transparent. First, when the problem arose. Second, with my written question. Third, with this oral question. All 3 opportunities, it seems to me, have been missed. Will he therefore undertake to provide a full account of what has gone wrong at the Airport and what is being done to correct the situation? Because at the moment it does look like I am a bit more clued up than he is.

Deputy I.J. Gorst:

Of course, Government can never win when it comes to talking about openness and transparency. I am the Minister with responsibility for the Office of the Director of Civil Aviation, and within the terms of that question, of course, there were other responsibilities that he wants me to either opine upon or provide information for. As I have said in answer to other questions, of course I am prepared to go back. The fact that Members have had so many questions means that we do need to ensure that Islanders are ultimately confident in the operation and security at the Airport, and not just myself and the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development in the meetings and the undertakings that we have had from the D.C.A. and the Ports of Jersey. I do think that, as I said in answer to Deputy Stephenson, that once the

review has been undertaken later this month, that is an opportunity for us to put further or fuller, if we are provided with it, information into the public domain.